Johnson's *Dictionary*
and "the Lexicons of Ancient Tongues"

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Abstract

Though Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) is often compared with the major vernacular dictionaries of the seventeenth century, a better point of comparison is the early modern lexicons of the classical languages, which Johnson knew well, and which informed his practice in his own lexicography.

Keywords: Classical Studies, Dictionary, Lexicography, Samuel Johnson

From the very beginning, the natural point of comparison for Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) has been the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* (1694). Johnson, the legend tells us, did single-handedly for the English language what the Académiciens had done for the French sixty years earlier. When he signed a contract and promised to produce a two-volume dictionary in just three years, he was measured against expectations set by the French: "But, Sir," his friend William Adams asked, "how can you do this in three years?" "Sir," Johnson responded, "I have no doubt that I can do it in three years". Adams thought immediately of the *Dictionnaire*, and made the comparison to Johnson:

> ADAMS. But the French Academy, which consists of forty members, took forty years to compile their Dictionary. JOHNSON. Sir, thus it is. This is the proportion. Let me see; forty times forty is sixteen hundred. As three to sixteen hundred, so is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman. (Boswell 1934-64, vol. 1, 186)

And when the work was completed – not three years later, to be fair, but a bit more than eight; still an impressive proportion – the conquest of the French was foremost in many minds. David Garrick, for instance, relished the French humiliation at Johnson's hands:

> Talk of war with a Briton, he'll boldly advance,
> That one English soldier will beat ten of France;
> Would we alter the boast from the sword to the pen,
> Our odds are still greater, still greater our men:
> In the deep mines of science though Frenchmen may toil,
> Can their strength be compar'd to Locke, Newton, and Boyle?
> […]
> And Johnson, well arm'd like a hero of yore,
> Has beat forty French, and will beat forty more! (300-01)

But while Johnson's *Dictionary* certainly has some similarities to the *Dictionnaire* – its two double-columned folio volumes, the hype surrounding its production, its monumental status in one of the major modern languages of Europe – the two books were in fact conceived on different plans, had different goals, and reflected different priorities. The *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (1612) may be closer to Johnson's, as will appear later. There is no question that Johnson knew and admired both of these works. As John Considine writes, as he began his work "Johnson had dictionaries in the academy tradition in mind, sometimes as rivals, but more importantly as models to be emulated" (2014, 125). But the most apt comparison is neither of the great academic vernacular dictionaries of the seventeenth century, but the tradition of early modern lexicography of the ancient learned languages, Latin and Greek. In fact Johnson, more than the creators of any of the English dictionaries published before his, is aligned with the humanist lexicography of the classical languages.

The widespread legend notwithstanding, Johnson's was not, of course, the "first English dictionary" (see Lynch 2020). It is not straightforward, though, to count the *Dictionary*'s predecessors, since the number is largely a function of the definition one uses. Here I follow Robin C. Alston in focusing on monolingual English dictionaries, excluding field-specific dictionaries and glossaries appended to other works, and limiting the count to "those works which (i) attempt to cover the whole range of the vocabulary" – though here Alston includes "hard-word" dictionaries, provided they are not restricted to one semantic domain – "and (ii) attempt a definition of each word, however briefly" (1965-2009, vol. 5, n.p.). These criteria produce a list of nineteen titles before the publication of Johnson's *Dictionary* in 1755, listed here in their first editions only:

- Robert Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall* (first edition 1604)
- John Bullokar's *English Expositor* (1616)
- Henry Cockeram's *English Dictionarie* (1623)
- Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* (1656)
- Edward Phillips's *New World of English Words* (1658)
- Elisha Coles's *English Dictionary* (1676)
- [Richard Hogarth], *Gazophylacium Anglicanum* (1689)
- J[ohn] K[ersey?]'s *New English Dictionary* (1702)
- Edward Cocker's *Cocker's English Dictionary* (1704)
- the anonymous *Glossographia Anglicana Nova* (1707)
- John Kersey's *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* (1708)
- Nathan Bailey's *Universal Etymological Dictionary* (1721) and *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1730), along with Joseph Nicol Scott's revision of the *New Universal* (1755)
- Benjamin Norton Defoe's *New English Dictionary* (1735)
- Thomas Dyche and William Pardon's *New General English Dictionary* (1735)
- Benjamin Martin's *Lingua Britannica Reformata* (1749)
- the anonymous *Pocket Dictionary or Complete English Expositor* (1753)
- John Wesley, *The Complete English Dictionary* (1753)

It is a diverse list, published over the course of a century and a half, ranging from 12mos to folios, from Cawdrey's 2,500 headwords to Bailey's 60,000. If we use this list as our basis for comparison, we can see a number of ways in which Johnson's classical interests made him an outlier in English lexicography.

1. Samuel Johnson, Classicist

Johnson was unusually well versed in the classical languages and literatures. Despite having a curtailed university education – funds ran out after thirteen months at Oxford – Johnson was an impressive classicist. At his entrance interview at Pembroke College, he "sat silent, till upon something which occurred in the course of conversation, he suddenly struck in and quoted Macrobius; and thus he gave the first impression of that more extensive reading in which he had indulged himself" (Boswell 1934-64, vol. 1, 59). And he kept up that interest in Latin and Greek authors, major and minor, through his entire lifetime. Among the projects he planned but never completed are a number of works on classical antiquity: a "History of Criticism, as it relates to judging of authours, from Aristotle to the present age", and a "Dictionary of Ancient History and Mythology". He hoped to write "Classical Miscellanies, Select Translations from ancient Greek and Latin authours", and he planned translations – often with notes – of Herodian's *History*, Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Rhetoric*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Hierocles of

Alexandria's commentary on the *Golden Verses*, Cicero's *Tusculanæ Disputationes* and *De Natura Deorum*; selected stories from Claudius Aelianus; and "Claudian, a new edition of his works, *cum notis variorum*, in the manner of Burman" (vol. 4, 381-82n; see also Tankard 2002).

We know, too, that he was well acquainted with the lexicons of the classical languages, including especially those of the Continental humanists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As James H. Sledd and Gwin J. Kolb observed in the 1950s, "The number of etymological works among his books was rather large, including not only Junius and Skinner but Bailey, of course, and Camden, John Davies' Welsh dictionary, Hickes's *Thesaurus*, Martinius' Latin etymological dictionary, Ménage, Minsheu, Somner's dictionary of Anglo-Saxon, and G. J. Voss's *Etymologicon linguae Latinae*. For a dictionary-maker, Johnson had a useful collection" (1955, 38). Paul Korshin was among the first to explore the subject at length in 1974. Still John Considine argues, with justice, that the subject has been neglected at least in part because "there has traditionally been a certain reluctance on the part of Anglophone scholars to see dictionaries of the English language in their European context" (2000, 206). The territory is best covered by Considine himself and by Robert DeMaria, Jr., who is one of the authorities on the *Dictionary*, and who has argued that Johnson's whole career can be seen as the progress of a frustrated would-be humanist scholar forced to make his way in a commercial vernacular market with little interest in classical learning. He observes "the presence of classical learning and literature on virtually every page of the *Dictionary*" (1986, 108).

We can be more specific. We know the state of Johnson's library with a good degree of confidence, because the sale catalogue from his own library survives. As Korshin notes, among his books "are important monuments of Renaissance lexicography, often very rare" (1974, 301). This list, probably incomplete, gives the major dictionaries of the learned languages – Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and polyglot dictionaries including at least one of these – and gives their lot numbers:

57.	Lexicon Hederici, Lips. 1754
89.	Linguarum veterum Thesauri, a G. Hickerio, 3 t., 1703
93.	Lexicon Græc. a Phavarino, Bas. 1538
95.	Tusani lexicon, 2 t., Bas. 1572
97.	Hesychii Dictionarium, Ven. 1514
103.	Suidæ lexicon, 2 t., Col Allob 1630
112.	Lexicon Pentaglotton, Franckf. 1612
113.	Scapulæ lexicon, 1636
137.	Schreveli lexicon, &c.
138.	Buxtorfi lexicon, &c.
152.	Hederici lexicon, &c.
221.	Hoffmani lexicon universale, 4 t., L. B. 1698
226.	Stephani Thesaurus Linguæ Latinæ, 4 t. in 3, 1734
227.	Suidæ lexicon, Græc. & Lat. Kusteri, 3 t. Cant. 1705
230.	Basili fabri thesaurus eruditionis scholasticæ, Lips. 1696
312.	Holyoke's dictionary, 1675, Minshewe's dictionary of eleven languages, 1617
316.	G. J. Vossi etymologicon linguæ Latinæ, Amst. 1695
336.	Calepino dictionarium, octo linguarum, 2 t. Par. 1588
338.	Thesaurus Pagnini linguæ sanctæ, Lugd. 1575
429.	Crispini lexicon, 1620, &c.
432.	Hederici lexicon, 1755, miscellanea græcorum aliquot scriptorum carmina, 1722
457.	Lexicon Ægyptiaco-Lexicon, a Scholtz, Oxon. 1775, &c.
461.	Thesaurus linguæ sacræ Merceri, Gen. 1614
462.	Lexicon Scapulæ, Gen. 1628. Dictionarium historicum, Lloydii, Oxon 1670
584.	Minshew's dictionary, &c.
603.	Scapulæ lexicon, &c.
641.	Constantini Lexicon Græco-Latinum Lugd. 1637
650.	Lexicon philologicum a Martinio, Bren. 1628[1]

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[1] Eddy 1993. My selection depends on some judgment calls. I exclude dictionaries that address the Germanic languages and living languages. Apart from the few that are described so vaguely as to escape identification completely, we can confidently identify nearly all:

There are several things this list does not tell us. Some descriptions are too vague to be useful: what, for instance, are we to make of "3. Dictionaries"? And we cannot be sure whether he owned these books in the 1740s and 1750s when he was at work on his own *Dictionary* – though it is worth noting that only the two editions of Benjamin Hederich, published in 1754 and 1755, and La Croze, published in 1775, could not have been at hand while he was writing the *Dictionary* in the early 1750s. All the others remain at least possible.

The list includes many of the most important early modern lexicons of the learned languages: Robert Estienne's *Thesaurus Linguæ Latinæ*, polyglot dictionaries by Calepino and John Minshew, multiple editions of Johann Scapula's *Lexicon Græco-Latinum*. And while Johnson's proficiency in languages like Hebrew and Coptic was minimal, he had at least enough interest in these languages to own their lexicons, and enough proficiency to use the books intelligently.

This list, moreover, is not comprehensive. We know Johnson used other lexicons that were not in his library at the time of his death, either because he worked with borrowed copies or because he once owned them but did not retain them until his death. He helped to prepare the *Catalogus Bibliothecae Harleianae* in 1743-45, just before he began work on the *Dictionary*, and that collection contains 345 dictionaries (see Korshin 1974, 301-3). Johnson made extensive use of some edition of Robert Ainsworth's *Thesaurus linguæ latinæ Compendiarius; or, A Compendious Dictionary of the Latin Tongue, Designed for the Use of the British Nations* (1736). DeMaria, in fact, counts more than 500 instances in which Johnson's definitions are lifted from Ainsworth's, with a particular concentration in the botanical vocabulary (1986, 114).[2] We see entries like *culerage*, "The same plant with Arse-smart. Ainsw.", and *patefaction*, "Act or state of opening. Ainsworth."

We know, then, that Johnson was well versed in the classics, and that he knew the important classical lexicons. We can go further: we also know that he envisioned himself as a belated Renaissance humanist lexicographer who happened to work in a vernacular language. He tells us as much explicitly. As he finished the fourth edition of his *Dictionary* in 1773 – the only unabridged edition after the first in which he had any direct hand – he composed, in Latin, one of his most personal and most revealing poems, and declared his affective connection to one of the giants of early modern classical lexicography.

Budé, Guillaume, Conrad Gessner, Jacobus Tusanus, and Adrianus Junius. Λεξικον Ελληνορωμαικον, *hoc est, Dictionarium Graecolatinum*. Basileae: Ex Officina Henricpetrina, 1572; Buxtorf, Johann. *Lexicon Hebraicum et Chaldaicum complectens omnes voces*. Editio tertio ab authore recognita. Basileæ: Typis Ludovici König, 1621; Calepino, Ambrogio. *Ambrosii Calepini Dictionarivm octo lingvarvm*. Parisiis: Nicolaum Niuellium, 1588; Constantin, Robert, and Franciscus Portus. *Lexicon Græco-Latinvm: nunc denuo recognitum et partim ipsius authoris, partim Francisci Porti*. 2 vols. Lugduni: Apud G.-A. Huguetan, 1637; Crespin, Jean. *Io. Crispini lexicon græcolatinvm: nunc recens restitutum & auctum*. Coloniae Allobrogum: Apud Iohannem Vignon, 1615; Faber, Basilius, August Buchner, and Christoph Cellarius. *Thesavrus Ervditionis Scholasticæ, sive, supellex instructissima vocum, verborum, ac locutionum, tum rerum, sententiarum, adagiorum & exemplorum*. Lipsiae: Apud Thomam Fritsch: Excudebat Immanuel Titius, 1696; Hederich, Benjamin. *Graecvm lexicon manvale: Tribvs partibvs constans hermenevtica, analytica, synthetica*. 2 vols. Lipsiae: In bibliopolio Ioh. Frid. Gleditschii, 1754; Id., *Lexicon Manvale Graecvm: Latinarvm [...] Interpretationem Graecam Exhibet*. Londini: W. Innys *et al.*; Hesychius, Alexandrinus. Ηεζυχιου λεξικον = *Hesychii Dictionarivm locupletiss: Ea fide ac diligentia excusum, ut hoc uno, ad veterum autorum fere omnium, ac poetarum in primis lectionem, iusti commentarii vice, uti qui vis possit, & plane nihil sit, quod ad rectam interpretationem desyderari hic queat*. [Venedig]: [Aldus], 1514; Hickes, George. *Linguarum vett. septentrionalium thesaurus: grammatico-criticus et archæologicus*. 4 vols. Oxoniae: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1703; Holyoake, Thomas, and Francis Holyoake. *A Large Dictionary in Three Parts: I. The English before the Latin [...] II. The Latin before the English [...] III. The Proper Names of Persons, Places and Other Things*. 3 vols. London: G. Sawbridge et al., 1676; La Croze, Mathurin Veyssière de. *Lexicon Ægyptiaco-Latinum ex veteribus illius linguæ monumentis*. Edited by Christianus Scholtz. Oxonii: E typogr. Clarendoniano, 1775; Martini, Matthias. *Lexicon philologicum, præcipue etymologicum*. Bremae: Willius, 1623; Minsheu, John. Ηγεμων εις τας γλωσσας· *id est, Ductor in linguas, The Gvide into Tongves: Cum illarum harmonia, & etymologijs, originationibus, rationibus, & derivationibus in omnibus his vndecim linguis, viz: 1. Anglica. 2. Cambro-Britanica. 3. Belgica. 4. Germanica. 5. Gallica. 6. Italica. 7. Hispanica. 8. Lusitanica seu Portugallica. 9. Latina. 10. Græca. 11. Hebrea, &c*. [London]: [Printed by William Stansby and Melchisidec Bradwood], 1617; Pagninus, Santes. שדקה ושל רצוא: *Hoc est, Thesavrvs lingua sanctæ, siue, Lexicon Hebraicvm*. Lugduni: Apud Bartholomæum Vincentium, 1575; Id., and Jean Mercier. ושל רצוא שדקה = *Thesavrvs Linguæ Sanctæ, siue, Lexicon Hebraicvm ordine & copia cæteris antehac editis anteferendum*. Coloniæ Allobrogvm: Petri de la Rouiere, 1614; Scapula, Johann. *Lexicon Græco-Latinum novum*. Editio ultima. Basileæ: Henricpetrinos, 1628; Id., Laurentius Martius, Jacob Zwinger, and John Harmar. *Lexicon Græco-Latinum novum*. Editio novissima. Londini: Typis Thomae Harperi, 1636; Schindlerus, Valentinus. *Lexicon Pentaglotton, Hebraicum, Chaldaicum, Syriacum, Talmudico-Rabbinicum, & Arabicum*. Hanoviae: Typis Joannis Jacobi Hennëi, 1612; Stephanus, Robertus. *Thesavrvs lingvæ Latinæ*. Ed. nova auctior. 4 vols. in 3. Londini: S. Harding, 1734; [Suidas] and Æmilius Portus. Σουιδας το μεν παρον βιβλιον Σουιδα. οι δε συνταξαμενοι τουτο, ανδρες σοφοι = *Suidas: Præsense quidem liber est Suidæ: Qui vero ipsum composuerunt, viri sapientes fuerunt …* 2 vols. Coloniae Allobrogum: Apud heredes Petri de la Rouiere, 1630; [Suidas] and Æmilius Portus, and Ludolf Küster. *Suidæ Lexicon, Græce & Latine: Textum Græcum cum manuscriptis codicibus collatum a quamplurimis mendis purgavit, notisque perpetuis illustravit*. 3 vols. Cantabrigiæ: Typis Academicis, 1705; Varinus, Camers. Λεξικον Βαρινου Φαβωρινου Καμηρτος του της Νουκαιριας Επικοπου = *Dictionarium Varini Phavorini Camertis*. Basileae: [Robert Winter], 1538; Vossius, Gerardus Joannes. *Gerardi Joannis Vossii Etymologicon linguæ latinæ*. Editio nova. 6 vols. Amstelodami: P. & I. Blaev, 1695.

        [2] There are more than twice as many Ainsworth citations in volume 2 of the *Dictionary*, covering L-Z, as in volume 1, suggesting that he relied on it more as he worked his way through the alphabet.

That he chose to write a poem in Latin in 1772 is itself telling, though not unusual for him. In fact many of his most personal thoughts were recorded in that language. He staved off insomnia by translating poems from the *Greek Anthology* into Latin. When in June 1783 he suffered a stroke and temporarily lost the ability to speak, he feared that he had lost the power to reason, and so tested his verbal acuity by composing a Latin poem. As he put it a few days later to Hester Thrale, "The lines were not very good, but I knew them not to be very good. I made them easily, and concluded myself to be unimpaired in my faculties" (Johnson 1992-94, 4:151).

Most relevant for his lexicographic interests, in 1772 he wrote "ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ (Post lexicon Anglicanum auctum et emendatum)", a poem of 54 lines of Latin hexameter. The title echoes the Delphic oracle's advice, "know thyself", an appropriate title for an introspective poem about his scholarly identity as he neared the end of a long career. It opens by invoking one of the great scholars of the previous century:

> Lexicon ad finem longo luctamine tandem
> Scaliger ut duxit, tenuis pertaesus opellae,
> Vile indignatus studium, nugasque molestas,
> Ingemit exosus, scribendaque lexica mandat
> Damnatis, poenam pro poenis omnibus unam. (Johnson 1995, 75)[3]

The reference is to Joseph Justus Scaliger (Scaliger the younger), who completed a manuscript *Thesaurus Linguæ Arabicæ* in 1597 and followed it with a bitter epigram:

> Si quem dura manet sententia iudicis olim,
> > Damnatum aerumnis suppliciisque caput:
> Hunc neque fabrili lassent ergastula massa,
> > Nec rigidas vexent fossa metalla manus.
> Lexica contexat, nam caetera quid moror? omnes
> > Poenarum facies hic labor unus habet.[4]

Johnson praises Scaliger, one of his intellectual heroes, as "sublimis, doctus, et acer" (75) ("lofty, learned, and keen-witted", 77, line 6). The poem shows he saw lexicography as an intense personal struggle, and that he aspired to be the sort of *heroic* figure that John Considine describes in his book-length "attempt to understand the association between dictionaries and heroic narratives". As Considine puckishly observes, real-life "Dictionary-making is not a conspicuously heroic business", but we are in the realm of legend. Johnson, who equally puckishly defined *lexicographer* as "a harmless drudge", "both acknowledges the possibility of seeing lexicographers as drudges and expects the intelligent reader to see them as something much more like heroes" (2008, 3-4). "Γνῶθι σεαυτόν" implies that a scholar needs to *earn* the melancholy that plagued him and Scaliger.

2. The Dictionary's *Classical Antecedents*

Johnson, then, knew the tradition of classical-language lexicography and thought of himself as part of it. What effect did this background have on the *Dictionary* he published?

2.1 Front Matter

Johnson declares his classical allegiances from the very first page. It has not, to my knowledge, been observed that Johnson's *Dictionary* is the first monolingual English dictionary to sport a proper classical title-page motto. There were antecedents of sorts – Cawdrey, for instance, has "*Legere, et non intelligere, neglegere est*", adapted from

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[3] Trans. by Baldwin in Johnson 1995, 77: "When Scaliger after a long struggle finally brought his dictionary to completion, utterly bored with the piddling result, indignant over the worthless pursuit and the tedious trifles, he groaned aloud in hatred, and prescribed the compilation of dictionaries for condemned criminals, to be the punishment of punishments, replacing all others". A reliable Latin text, a readable and faithful modern English translation, and a good discussion can be found in Baldwin's edition (75-86).

[4] Trans. by Baldwin in Johnson 1995, 82: "If the harsh sentence of a judge awaits someone in the future, a person condemned to toil and punishment, let not prisons weary him with their workman's anvils, and let not the mining of metal pain his calloused hands. Let him compile lexicons! I need say no more. This one occupation contains all forms of punishment". The full text of Scaliger's lexicon has never been published – Scaliger, in fact, forbade its publication in his "Testament" of 1607: see Scaliger 1927, 68. It is now Leiden University Library MS Or. 212.

Cato's *Distichs*, helpfully translated immediately below for the "unskilfull persons" who constituted his readership as "As good not read, as not to understand." Bullokar in 1616 is a bit more adventurous, with an untranslated Greek epigraph: "Εργονγ οὖδεν ὄνειδος". It comes (having picked up an errant gamma along the way) from Hesiod's *Works and Days* line 311, "Work is no disgrace". Coles has a few lines from Horace, though they are quoted from Ben Jonson's English translation, not the Latin. Kersey's *Dictionarium* is attributed on the title page to "John Kersey, *Philobibl.*", and both of Bailey's dictionaries to "N. Bailey, Φιλολόγος" (Kersey the book-lover, Bailey the word-lover). And the anonymous *Pocket Dictionary* of 1753 comes with a cheeky "Μέγα βιβλίον μέγα Κακὸν", "A big book is a great evil", an aphorism traced to Callimachus (fragment 465) – a pre-emptive defense against accusations that a mere pocket dictionary was not what the world needed in 1753. Of these, only Bullokar's can be said to require any actual classical knowledge, and he trips over his own feet with the misspelling.

Compare the title-page epigraph from Johnson's first edition:

Cum tabulis animum censoris sumet honesti:
Audebit quæcunque parum splendoris habebunt,
Et sine pondere erunt, et honore indigna ferentur.
Verba movere loco; quamvis invita recedant,
Et versentur adhuc intra penetralia Vestæ:
Obscurata diu populo bonus eruet, atque
Proferet in lucem speciosa vocabula rerun,
Quæ priscis memorata Catonibus atque Cethegis,
Nunc situs informis premit et deserata vetustas. HOR.

The source is Horace's *Epistles*, 2.2.110-18. Johnson had used the same epigraph (at least the first five lines) in *Rambler* 88, published in 19 January 1751, when he was at work on the *Dictionary*. In a later printing of the *Rambler* he provided Thomas Creech's verse translation to accompany the Latin, but a more literal translation may be useful:

But the man whose aim is to have wrought a poem true to Art's rules, when he takes his tablets, will take also the spirit of an honest censor. He will have the courage, if words fall short in dignity, lack weight, or be deemed unworthy of rank, to remove them from their place, albeit they are loth to withdraw, and still linger within Vesta's precincts. Terms long lost in darkness the good poet will unearth for the people's use and bring into the light – picturesque terms which, though once spoken by a Cato and a Cethegus of old now lie low through unseemly neglect and dreary age. (Horace 1926, 433-35)

It requires no great leap of imagination to see Johnson – a self-described "poet doomed at last to wake a lexicographer" (2005, 100) – trying to identify himself with both the "honest censor" and the "good poet" bringing old words back to light.

And when we open the *Dictionary* we see even more signs of influence from humanist lexicons. Johnson's preface to the *Dictionary* is now one of his best-known works, and occupies an important place in history as the first statement of principles in English lexicography. It is particularly notable for wrestling with many of the problems that, more than a quarter-millennium later, continue to be the biggest challenges for working lexicographers, and also for its strikingly personal statements, culminating in his gloomy conclusion, "I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please, have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise" (113). It deserves more attention, though, for its affiliation with a classical lexicographic tradition. As Considine writes, "Dictionaries in the academy tradition had always been presented with prefaces, but Johnson's was strikingly unlike theirs because of the powerfully autobiographical elements which make it such a wonderful literary achievement. [...] Johnson's model for this is to be found in early modern work on ancient texts: particularly in the prefaces of Henri Estienne, and most particularly in Estienne's preface to the *Thesaurus græcæ linguæ* of 1572" (2014, 129).

2.2 Main Text

As we turn from the front matter to the main body of the dictionary, the classical antecedents continue to exert their influence. We do not know how much input Johnson had on questions of typography and page design. The *Dictionary* was a booksellers' project, after all, and the booksellers may well have had clear ideas of what their book would look like once Johnson delivered the text. But whatever the driving force, the *Dictionary* introduced a number of innovations into English lexicography, and many of them seem to have been influenced by classical

lexicons. Johnson's large two-columned folio page, with hanging indents, all-capital running heads, and a blend of uppercase and small-cap headwords looks nothing like most of his predecessors' pages (see Luna 2005). Even Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum*, 2nd ed. (1736), which comes closest, uses not hanging but paragraph indention. Johnson's *Dictionary* looks much more like Robert Estienne's *Thesaurus linguæ latinæ* (1531), Henri Estienne's Θησαυρος της Ελληνικης γλωσσης = *Thesaurus graecæ linguæ* (1572), or Schindler's *Lexicon pentaglotton* (1612).[5]

The influence of the classical tradition on Johnson's wordlist is less obvious. Perhaps counterintuitively, Johnson's *Dictionary* includes a smaller proportion of words derived from Latin and Greek than many of his precursors. To get a sense of the proportion of classical languages, I have looked at all the entries beginning *ne-* and offered rough counts of the origins of the words in Johnson and five of his most important precursors, roughly categorizing them as Latinate (including the Romance languages), Greek, Germanic, and "other":[6]

	Latinate/ Romance	Greek	Germanic	Other
Cawdrey (1604)	5 (63%)	3 (37%)	–	–
Bullokar (1616)	8 (73%)	3 (27%)	–	–
Blount (1656)	27 (61%)	15 (34%)	2 (5%)	–
Phillips (1658)	17 (55%)	8 (26%)	5 (16%)	1 (3%)
Bailey (1736)	103 (46%)	45 (20%)	73 (33%)	2 (1%)
Johnson (1755)	49 (34%)	12 (8%)	85 (58%)	–

Johnson, we can see, devotes only 42 percent of his headwords in this section to words of Greek or Latin origin, compared to 100 percent of those in the earliest English dictionaries and two-thirds of those in Bailey. Precise figures will vary in different parts of the *Dictionary*, but the general pattern holds.

How do we explain the classically educated Johnson's seeming lack of interest in words of classical origins? Virtually all seventeenth-century monolingual English dictionaries focused particularly, even exclusively, on "inkhorn terms" – what Cawdrey called "hard usual words" – and in the eighteenth century the tradition was not entirely moribund. This makes for a disproportionate number of Latin- and Greek-derived headwords. Many early English lexicographers swelled their headword counts by coining endless words from Latin and Greek roots, with little regard for whether they were actually in use in English, and no regard whatsoever for whether they were known beyond a tiny circle of initiates. Thus we get alphabetical runs like this, from Bailey's *Universal Etymological Dictionary* (1721): *hyperoa*, *hyperphysical*, *hyperthyron*, or *mucrocordis*, *mucronated*, *mucronatum*, *muculency*.

Johnson's relatively few Latinate and Greek terms are a result of his principled decision to include only words he found in his reading. And this more restricted wordlist, less given over to on-the-spot coinages from Latin or Greek, is itself a product of a classical lexicographic tradition. Many lexicographers who set out to capture what Johnson called "the boundless chaos of a living speech" (2005, 84) have taken the liberty of coining words of their own, listing words they thought *might* exist or *should* exist. Classical lexicographers did not have the same freedom. While Johnson recognized that "the lexicons of ancient tongues" could be "inadequate and delusive", still they are "now immutably fixed, and comprised in a few volumes" (112). In cataloguing a language with a clearly demarcated and finite corpus they almost necessarily limit themselves to "real words". Few lexicographers of dead languages feel the compulsion to fatten their wordlists with novel coinages, and their dictionaries were grounded in the actual usage of ancient authors – at least as far as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philology permitted.

Johnson brought that same principle to English, and his wordlist includes *almost* entirely words he found in his reading project. The *almost* comes from his occasional hesitation over some words, as he wondered whether they were in fact in use:

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[5] The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* also has hanging indents, two columns, all-capital running heads, and small-cap headwords.
[6] Why *ne-*? By the middle of the alphabet most lexicographers have settled on their working methods, and words beginning with *ne-* are not dominated by prefixes associated with any one language family. I exclude proper names and proverbs, and count as Greek words that were originally Greek but passed through Latin. All the counts should be considered approximate since what constitutes an entry, what constitutes a proper name, and the origin of many words necessarily involve many judgment calls.

Many words yet stand supported only by the name of *Bailey*, *Ainsworth*, *Philips*, or the contracted *Dict.* for *Dictionaries* subjoined: of these I am not always certain that they are seen in any book but the works of lexicographers. Of such I have omitted many, because I had never read them; and many I have inserted, because they may perhaps exist, though they have escaped my notice: they are, however, to be yet considered as resting only upon the credit of former dictionaries. (87-88)

More than fifteen hundred entries or senses are so marked in the dictionary, including such obscurities as *abannition*, *abarcy*, *aberuncate*, *ablegate*, *ablepsy*, *abnodation*, *abstentaneous*, *abstorted*, *abstricted*, *abstringe*, *abstrude* …, the overwhelming majority of which are of either Latin or Greek origin.

2.3 Etymologies

Johnson is remembered as, at best, a mediocre etymologist. On etymologies from the classical languages, however, he was generally sound, if without any original insights. The *Dictionary* includes the full word "Latin" in 5,230 of the first edition's etymologies and "Lat." in 4,112 more – significantly more even than "French" (2,897) and "Fr." (4,100). There is, of course, overlap among these two groups; as Johnson observes in his preface, "Of many words it is difficult to say whether they were immediately received from the *Latin* or the *French*, since at the time when we had dominions in *France*, we had *Latin* service in our churches" (2005, 77). Only 61 works are explicitly identified as of "Greek" or "Gr." origin, though the Greek typeface, as in "PO´LITICK. *adj.* [πολιτικὸς]", makes an explicit identification unnecessary.

Johnson's most evident weakness was in the Germanic languages, and there he could look to few others for guidance. "Our knowledge of the northern literature is so scanty", he complained, "that of words undoubtedly *Teutonick* the original is not always to be found in any ancient language" (83). He acknowledged his debt to Stephen Skinner's *Etymologicon Linguæ Anglicanæ* (1671) and Franciscus Junius's *Etymologicum Anglicanum* (1743): "For the *Teutonick* etymologies I am commonly indebted to *Junius* and *Skinner*, the only names which I have forborn to quote when I copied their books; not that I might appropriate their labours or usurp their honours, but that I might spare a perpetual repetition by one general acknowledgment" (81). When he was forced to venture an opinion of his own on a matter of Germanic etymology, he rarely had much to say. At least he was usually honest about the fact. Most of his weak etymologies simply admit ignorance – for *boy* "the etymology is not agreed on", and of *girl* he writes, "About the etymology of this word there is much question", with previous etymologists proposing Greek, Latin, Welsh, "Saxon", and Icelandic origins. Only occasionally does he embarrass himself with his own hypotheses, as in his swing-and-a-miss conjecture for *spider*:

> *Skinner* thinks this word softened from *spinder*, or *spinner*, from *spin*: *Junius*, with his usual felicity, dreams that it comes from σπίζειν, to extend; for the spider extends his web. Perhaps it comes from *spieden*, Dutch; *speyden*, Danish, to spy, to lye upon the catch. *Dor*, *dora*, Saxon, is a *beetle*, or properly an *humble bee*, or *stingless bee*. May not *spider* be *spy dor*, the insect that watches the *dor*?

His ghost can perhaps take some comfort in the thought that his most important successors over the next century were no better than he in Germanic etymologies, and the most prominent, Noah Webster and Charles Richardson, were far worse.

2.4 Quotations

The classical influence on Johnson's lexicography is especially clear in the use of illustrative quotations, roughly 115,000 of them. It is well known that Johnson was the first English lexicographer to make extensive use of quotations; "Quotation gathering, while new in England, was an old story with the Continental dictionaries of the Renaissance" (Korshin 1974, 304).

It is true that the French *Dictionnaire* includes examples of words in use, but most of these examples are invented. The formula "On dit" (or "On appelle") signals the Académiciens' handiwork, and authors' names are hard to find.[7] Classical lexicons, on the other hand, were grounded in textual evidence. Calepino is an important figure here, as Considine tells us:

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[7] Once again, the Italian *Vocabolario* is more devoted to actual examples than the *Dictionnaire* – brief phrases, rarely more than a line of text, with a citation, as in this entry for *fronda*, defined as "Foglia" and traced to "Lat. *frons, dis*": "Bocc. n. 96. 19. Senza auer preso, o pigliare del suo amore, fronde, fiore, o frutto. Petr. Son. 248. Non ramo, o fronda uerde in queste piagge. Dan Par. 15. O fronda mia, in che io compiacemmi. Qui è metaf. e. ual figliuolo, o nipote, o nato di lui. Son. 288. Ma, ricogliendo le sue sparte fronde, Dietro leuò, Dan. Purg. c. 12. […]". (1612, 368, s.v. *Fronda*).

The dictionary was a response to the new printed dissemination of classical Latin texts, and aimed to document their vocabulary while excluding that of the post-classical world. It is particularly notable for its use of illustrative quotations from ancient authors. [...] "Here", as one historian of the lexicography of Latin has said of Calepino's work, "we have in front of us, although in a quite rudimentary form, the prototype of the modern Latin dictionary". (2008, 29)

Considine also notes some of the shortcomings that made Calepino merely "rudimentary":

the quotations from ancient authors are sometimes missing, and they are very summarily referenced, to author and work or even to author alone (here, Calepino suffered to some extent from the limitations of the texts available to him, since early printed editions of classical authors lacked the page numbering that makes it easy to give precise references to every quotation). [...] The quotations are not set off typographically from the surrounding text. (30)

Still Calepino would have been an obvious model for Johnson, and his ostentatious erudition immediately strikes the eye, with five typefaces – roman, italic, Greek, Hebrew, black-letter here indicated with boldface – in a single entry. Here is how one entry, for the verb *litigo* "dispute, sue", appeared in the edition of Calepino Johnson owned, with Latin quotations accompanied by citations:

Lītĭgo, as, penultima correpta, Discepto contendo, siue id in foro sit, siue extra forum. {בר *rab* הצה *histsah*, G. ἀμφισβητῶ, ἐγκαλῶ, δικάζομαι, διαφέρομαι. Auoir noise, debat, different ou proces côtre quelqu'vn. I. *litigare, far lite*. G. **Zanken spenneing sein.** H. *Pleytar ô contender*. A. **To stryue, to debate, to be at variance.}** Cic. pro Cælio, Aliquot enim in causis videram eum frustra litigantem. Mart. lib. 7. Ah miser & demens viginti litigat annos Quisquam, cui vinci Gargiliane licet? Plaut. in Rud. Qua de re nunc litigatis inter vos? Cic. ad. Att. Hircius cum Quinto acerrimè pro me litigauit. Idem Qu. Frat. Litigarē tecum, si fas esset.

Not all classical dictionaries, it is true, included illustrative examples, and those that did sometimes skipped full extensive quotations, working on the assumption that learned readers would own good editions of the primary texts. But many of the major early modern lexicons of the learned languages were loaded with citations to ancient authors. An eighteenth-century edition of Robert Estienne's *Thesuarus linguæ latinæ* is typical: under *sylvæ*, after a definition ("generale nomen est, proprie arborum, et quæ cædua est") comes a list of the briefest snippets followed by detailed citations:

Brachia silvarum, Rami. Stat. 1. Theb. 362.
Comæ silvarum, Frondes. Stat. 3. Silv. 3. 98.
Filia silvæ pinus. Hor. 1. Carm. 14. 12.
Gloria silvarum pinus. Stat. 5. Silv. 1. 151.
Agrestis. Ovid. 7. Met. 142.
Alta. Ovid. 14. Met. 364.
Antiqua. Virg. 6. Æn. 179. (Estienne 1743, vol. 4, 241, s.v. *sylvæ*)

Henri Estienne's *Thesaurus græcæ Linguæ*, too, included brief quotations from Greek authors, sometimes with a full citation, more often with simply an author's name. And Ainsworth's *Thesaurus Linguæ Latinæ Compendiarius*, an important source for Johnson, is similar:

Ingrăvesco, ĕre. incept. (1) *To grow more heavy, weighty*, or *lumpish*. (2) *To become worse, to increase, to grow bigger*. (3) *To rise to a higher price*. (1) Vix credibili pondere ingravescat, *Plin*. 31, 7. (2) Ingravescit in dies malum, *Cic*. ad *Brut*. 10. (3) Annona ingravescere consuevit, *Cæs. B. C.* 1, 52. *vid. & Cic.* pro *Domo*, 5. (Ainsworth 1736, s.v. *Ingrăvesco*.)

2.5 Classical Authors' Cameos

There are other signs of Johnson's classical learning throughout the *Dictionary*. DeMaria writes that

One cannot read far in the *Dictionary* without encountering the names of Aristotle, Vergil, and Homer. Also prominent are Cicero, Caesar, Horace, Seneca, Juvenal, Plato, and Pindar. Some of the many others that crop up here and there are Claudius, Caligula, Dionysius, Antony, Octavius, Lucan, Agrippa, Lucretius, Hiero, Demosthenes, Hesiod, Pythagoras, Titus, Vespasian, Plutarch, Vitruvius, Ptolemy, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristides, Galen, Xerxes, Archimedes, Anacreon, Themistocles, Theseus, Philo, Casselius, Anaxagoras, Solon, Prodicus, Telegonus, and Cato. (DeMaria 1986, 110)

These names are especially evident in the many English translations from classical authors: Horace above all, but also "Addison's Ovid; Chapman's Homer; Creech's Juvenal and Manilius; Dryden's Vergil, Homer, Ovid, Lucretius, and Juvenal; Garth's Ovid; May's Vergil; Pope's Homer (with his and Broome's notes); Pope's Statius; Tate's Juvenal; and West's Pindar" (108). For Johnson these translations are emphatically works of English literature, worthy of inclusion in an English dictionary, even though he worried that "The great pest of speech is frequency of translation" (2005, 108). Translations were important enough that, in his career-topping *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81), he gave the major translations from the classical languages serious attention.

And while most are, not all the classical authors are translated. On special occasions Johnson drops in classical quotations – sometimes with a translation, often without – to comment on some theme that is larger than the English language. The etymology for *caitiff*, for instance, is clearly inspired by his detestation of the slave trade, and he signals his indignation with an untranslated quotation from Homer:

cattivo, Ital. a slave; whence it came to signify a bad man, with some implication of meanness; as *knave* in English, and *fur* in Latin; so certainly does slavery destroy virtue. Ἥμισυ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀποάινυται δούλιον ἦμαρ. *Homer*. A slave and a scoundrel are signified by the same words in many languages.

The Greek quoted (with variations) from *Odyssey* 17.322-23, when the swineherd Eumaeus laments that Zeus "takes away half a man's worth [*aretê*] the day he becomes a slave". And the entry for *lich* "A dead carcase" leads him to think of related words – *lichwake* "the time or act of watching by the dead", *lichgate* "the gate through which the dead are carried to the grave" – which leads him to think of his hometown:

Lichfield, the field of the dead, a city in Staffordshire, so named from martyred christians. *Salve magna parens.*

The line comes from Vergil's *Georgics* 2.173-76:

Salve, magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus,
magna virum; tibi res antiquae laudis et artem
ingredior, sanctos ausus recludere fontis,
Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen.[8]

Conclusion

Might Johnson have gone too far? In trying to be a great classical lexicographer, did he miss the opportunity to be a great English lexicographer? "The eighteenth-century grammarians" routinely feature as the villains in histories of linguistic and lexicographic malfeasance, and are often accused of misunderstanding the nature of the English language, forcing a West Germanic language to conform to Latinate rules. Johnson is not entirely immune from such charges. But he recognized English and Latin were very different languages. As early as the *Plan* (1747), he sought "to preserve the purity and ascertain the meaning of the English idiom; and this seems to require nothing more than that our language be considered so far as it is our own" (Johnson 2005, 29).

Johnson, it is fair to say, "asked no questions, gave no answers, and invented no techniques which were new to Europe, though they may very well have been new to English lexicography" (Sledd and Kolb 1955, 4). His achievement is the synthesis of many parts, not a single breakthrough, and he found most of those parts outside the mainstream tradition of English lexicography from Cawdrey to Bailey and Martin.

Johnson was a little too early to play a role in the next major importation of classical lexicography into English. In the early nineteenth century, Franz Ludwig Carl Friedrich Passow's *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache* (1819-24) called for a thorough historicization of every sense of every word in the Greek language. Johnson had generally arranged his quotations in chronological order, but not strictly, and he provided no dates for his citations. Neither did he arrange his senses in chronological order; this selection from the *Plan* describes how he conceived the arrangement of senses:

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[8] Trans.: "Hail, land of Saturn! Great mother of corn and wine, great mother of men. For you I venture open the sacred fountain and sing the song of the Ascraean through the towns of Rome". Ascra was home to Hesiod, so there is a recursive quality to this invocation.

it seems necessary to sort the several senses of each word, and to exhibit first its natural and primitive signification [...] Then to give its consequential meaning, to *arrive*, to reach any place whether by land or sea; as, he *arrived* at his country seat. [...] Then its metaphorical sense [...] Then to mention any observation that arises from the comparison of one meaning with another [...] Then follows the accidental or consequential signification [...] Then the remoter or metaphorical signification [...] After having gone through the natural and figurative senses, it will be proper to subjoin the poetical sense of each word, where it differs from that which is in common use [...] To the poetical sense may succeed the familiar [...] The familiar may be followed by the burlesque [...] And lastly, may be produced the peculiar sense, in which a word is found in any great author. (2005, 47-48, italics in original)

In the *Dictionary* he did not stick strictly to this vision, but he generally proceeded from literal to metaphorical senses without regard for chronology. Johnson's *Dictionary*, therefore, cannot be called a "historical dictionary", and this was the greatest desideratum of Richard Chenevix Trench in *On Some Deficiencies in Our English Dictionaries* (1857). Passow's historical method was picked up in German vernacular lexicography by the Brothers Grimm, and in English classical lexicography by Liddell and Scott, but would not form the basis of an English-language dictionary until the *Oxford English Dictionary*. But in adopting several classical precedents – a wordlist based on textual evidence, quotations illustrating words in use – Johnson put English lexicography on a firm foundation.

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